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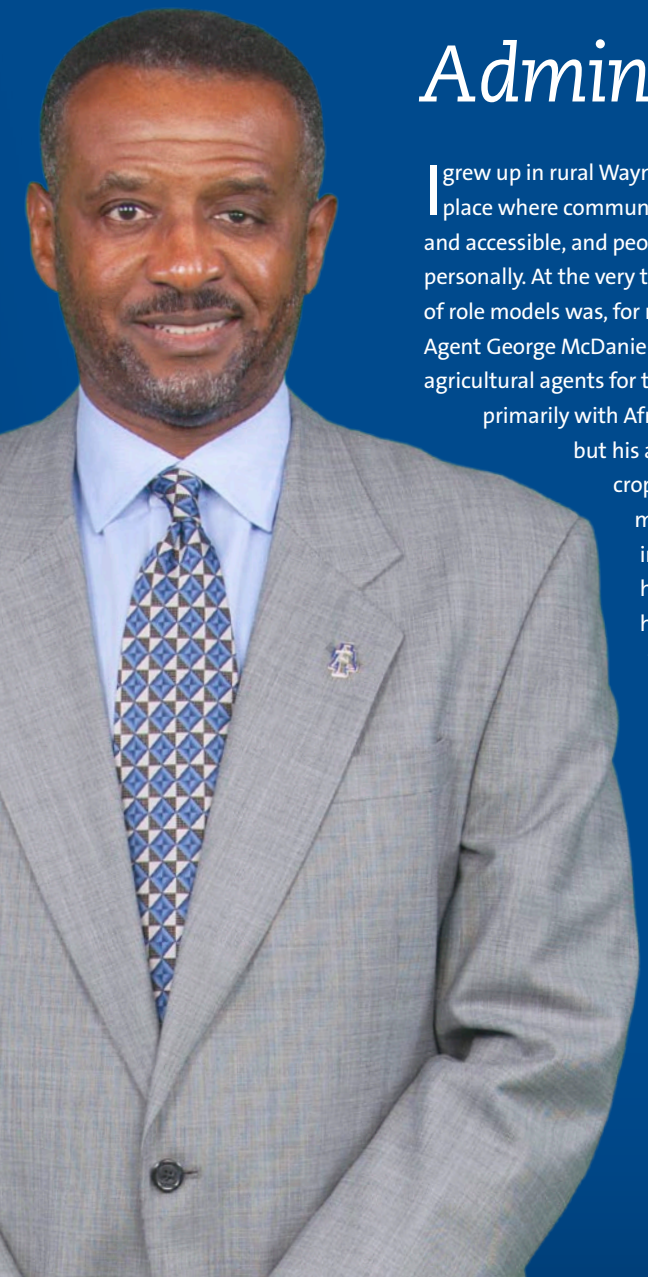

Administrator's Message

I grew up in rural Wayne County in a time and place where community leaders were visible and accessible, and people knew their leaders personally. At the very top of that small mountain of role models was, for me, Cooperative Extension Agent George McDaniel. He was one of the agricultural agents for the county. He worked primarily with African American farmers but his attention didn't stop at crops or livestock. He helped my family and others to improve their farms. But he also helped people find housing. He helped people with getting their taxes prepared. He cared about our community and others because he saw them as his communities.

George McDaniel is one of the major reasons that I sought a career in Cooperative Extension. I wanted to emulate his knowledge, his kindness and helpfulness to the community. As the administrator of The Cooperative Extension Program at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, my ambition to be like George McDaniel has been realized. Caring about the community is what I do and what I foster. And Cooperative Extension extends commitment to communities better than any other agency in this state and in this nation. We care.

In times of natural disaster, we care and respond. Cooperative Extension provides leadership training for children and adults. Our educational programs ensure a healthy, safe and abundant food supply. We also help people manage their relationships with food and we help them manage their money, too. We protect the environment and natural resources. We promote economic development and community development.

In this most recent edition of *Solutions for North Carolina*™ you'll see and hear directly from people across the state who have benefited from Cooperative Extension's expertise and encouragement. In Beaufort, Harnett and Rockingham counties, we're encouraging youth — through 4-H — to have greater self-esteem, and we are preparing them for successful futures. We're helping farmers in Robeson and Watauga counties adopt better production practices to help them grow their farm incomes.

Cooperative Extension's experts and strategies have helped a Scotland County grandmother become an even better guardian to her two precocious grandchildren, and enabled a disabled man in Forsyth County to become a tax-paying, first-time homeowner. Also in Forsyth County, a community garden has been cultivated into a microcosm of Cooperative Extension, feeding its less fortunate neighbors, empowering people and finding solutions.

People's lives have been improved. And when we help others, we help ourselves.

Cesar Chavez — the late labor leader who co-founded what is now United Farm Workers — may have said it best when he noted, "We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community.... Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own."

Encouraging the community is the way we all prosper; that's what I stand for. If he were still living, I hope George McDaniel would be proud of me. What's more, I know he'd certainly be proud of all the meaningful work undertaken and accomplished by Cooperative Extension today.

Dr. M. Ray McKinnie
Associate Dean and Administrator
The Cooperative Extension Program
N.C. A&T State University

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A dreamland that's a reality check

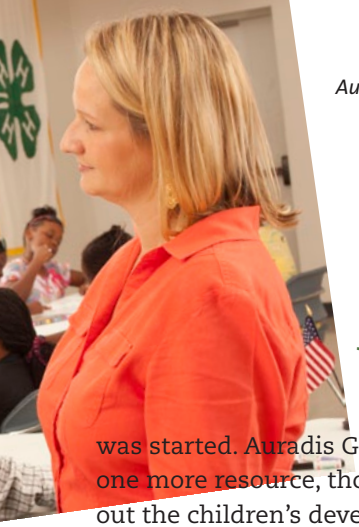
WASHINGTON — It started on the school bus. Children piled on and off Ambrose Griffin's Beaufort County school bus every day in various states of clamor and disruption – before he settled them down. Griffin speculated that most of the children just needed attention and the benefit of faith.

He told his wife, Auradis: "I sure would like to see them in a different environment."

So the Griffins created that different environment. They hosted pizza parties at West End Baptist Church, feeding the kids from the bus with pepperoni and personal attention. As many as 60 children began to attend the parties every Wednesday night, for three years. The parties got so big — and expensive — that the Griffins knew they couldn't continue them, but they didn't want to give up on the children. So Auradis Griffin turned to the community again, asking Pastor Clara Albritton and Your Day of Deliverance Church of God, in Chocowinity, for help.

Day of Deliverance delivered. A summer program, with Bible instruction and tutoring,

Keziah Worsley, 7, proudly shows off her work during a summer meeting of the Talented Dreamers 4-H club.



Auradis Griffin (left) and 4-H Youth Development Agent Erin Massie

Auradis Griffin has literal as well as figurative pointers for Stacey Norfleet, 11, and other members of the Talented Dreamers 4-H Club.

When youth development projects sprout from community roots, the fruits include a sense of involvement and a pride in invested energies.

was started. Auradis Griffin wanted one more resource, though, to even out the children's development. So she went to the Beaufort County Cooperative Extension Center for help and met 4-H Youth Development Agent Erin Massie. 4-H helped organize the children, ages 5 to 17, into a club, working with them on specific programs ranging from STEM (science, technology, engineering or math fields) activities to character development.

The Talented Dreamers chapter of 4-H, at 38 members, is one of the newest and largest chapters in Beaufort County. Members are African American and Hispanic, and turn out in large numbers for most every 4-H meeting and event conducted. Children who were shy and withdrawn, children who were disruptive and noisy, children who just wanted a place to be, have become more confident, better mannered and actively engaged.

In fact, "Children who had participated in 4-H for at least one year by ninth grade were … more likely than children in other out-of-school-time (OST) programs to be in the highest (positive youth development) trajectory" and more than twice as likely to give back to their communities, according to the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development, a longitudinal examination of youth participation in 4-H program and activities started in 2002.

"This is huge," Massie says. "You don't see classes this big in a limited-resource audience. The fact that Mrs. Auradis can get thirty-some kids who want to come and be involved is outstanding."

During a summer meeting of the Talented Dreamers, Roberto Gomez, 17, calls the group to order and leads members in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. As the meeting continues, Massie has a discussion with them about values, and asks members to define the word.

"It means something you treasure," says Tommy Ebron, 11, who has politely raised his hand before volunteering an answer.

When he first came to the Talented Dreamers, Tommy couldn't sit still, wouldn't be quiet and got angry when chastised. But through positive redirection and 4-H and church activities in which he was empowered and valued, Tommy began to change.

"I learned how to cook and how to talk to people in a nice way — without saying mean things," Tommy says. "And how not to talk when other people are talking."

Tommy's big sister, Taijae Latham, 17, attests to her brother's development, saying: "He doesn't talk back like he used to or interrupt. He wasn't disrespectful before, but he would talk a lot."

Before Talented Dreamers, Latham says, she was "kind of anti-social" and wanted to be alone all the time. The 4-H public speaking activities also helped her to become more confident in articulating her points, Latham says.

"I used to hang my head when people talked to me, because I didn't want to hear them," Latham says. "Mrs. Auradis said not to hang my head because I was a beautiful person. My mama always told me that too, but I thought she just said that because she was my mom."

Latham and her brother's changes are backed up by statistical examinations made in the 4-H study of more than 7,000 students, which notes that youth have a greater chance of avoiding negative behaviors if they are in programs that offer: "positive and sustained relationships between youth and adults, activities that build important life skills and (provide) opportunities for children to use the life skills as both participants and as leaders in valued community activities."

Auradis Griffin says it a lot plainer and direct to the heart of things: "With children, all they want is to know that you love them and that you will chastise them. They want that structure."

Lighting a fire under smoke-free agriculture

The decline in tobacco production in North Carolina has made Extension's guidance on new crops and technological innovations as essential as sun and water.

PEMBROKE — When David Hunt was growing up in Robeson County, his father, extended family and many neighbors farmed and worked together. As better economic opportunities beckoned, Hunt and his peers left the farms for the factories, taking with them a way of life and a sense of community.

But Hunt, 55, has come back to farming. Seeking ways to increase his profits, Hunt worked with Nelson Brownlee — Cooperative Extension's area specialized agent serving Robeson and Bladen counties — who recommended such alternative agricultural practices as black plastic, drip irrigation and a high-tunnel greenhouse. After attending demonstrations on these technologies, conducted by The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T, Hunt got a $500 producer's grant from Cooperative Extension for the greenhouse materials and built one on his farm. He then used the greenhouse to extend his growing season for tomatoes into fall, resulting in a $500 increase in his 2011 crop's value over 2010.

Hunt also plans to try black plastic and drip irrigation again in the upcoming growing season. A trial run with the plastic in 2011 resulted in "less weed and less need for pesticides," Hunt says, and an additional $600 in income. To be fully successful, though, Hunt says he needs a deep well water supply to keep the produce irrigated, and is working on securing financing.

Lately, Hunt has been growing 1½–2 acres of peppers, watermelons, cantaloupes, honeydews and okra. But fruit and vegetables don't command the same profitability as the tobacco and cotton that he and his family grew during his youth.

His father farmed 50 acres of tobacco and another 100 acres of other commodities. He also worked with neighbors and extended family on joint farming projects. From the time he was 7 or so, Hunt had his own acre of tobacco and cotton that he farmed under the supervision of his father.

"But when the tobacco played out, we had to find other things to do," Hunt says.

He went to work for the state corrections office, but he always worked a little piece of land. Then, 10 years ago, when he was building a new house and needed ideas on landscaping, Hunt sought information at the Robeson County Cooperative Extension Center. And, in a sense, he's never left.

I got down there and started seeing the brochures on the different things and said, 'wait a minute,'" Hunt says. "All the information they had on gardening, livestock and the different programs was a lot to offer."

When a heart ailment forced him into early retirement from his corrections job, Hunt knew that Cooperative Extension could help him return to farming full

David Hunt, (left), a Robeson County farmer, gets some assistance from Cooperative Extension Agent Nelson Brownlee.

time. Since then, he's been steadily working to increase his farm income. Hunt is one of the leading participants of the UNC-Pembroke Curbside Market, which is gearing up for its third year. He also is continuing his high-tunnel greenhouse with plans to expand both his growing season and his produce operation.

"I've been farming all my life," Hunt says. "I'm just beginning to use it now as a profit.

"Cooperative Extension has opened doors to where I can be more educated about what I'm doing."

Robeson County farmer David Hunt smiles while selling produce at the UNC-Pembroke Curbside Market.

Making the roof overhead…

…sound footing for a new lease on life

Wayne Springs has become a proud new homeowner of the Hunter Hills neighborhood of Winston-Salem.

Financial management classes are setting the foundation for first-time homeownership and community pride that reflects a newfound sense of personal accomplishment.

WINSTON-SALEM — In the Hunter Hills neighborhood where Wayne Springs has turned a 1,600-square-foot house on an acre lot into his retreat, the neighborhood children know him. They call to him if he's working in his yard, taking out the trash or gardening. Then they're off to play.

The sight of happy children is a most revealing difference between his former residence and the community that Springs now calls home.

"Where I lived previously, the children did not play outside in the neighborhood," says Springs, 49. "It wasn't safe."

Springs became a first-time homeowner in September 2011, after attending financial management classes co-sponsored by Forsyth County Cooperative Extension, Family Services Inc. and the Housing Authority of Winston-Salem.

Studies of homeownership have recorded its positive impacts on everything from children's performance in school to physical health to community activism. Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies notes, not surprisingly, that because homeowners control the physical look and design of their houses, they are ultimately more satisfied and successful than those who don't own their dwellings. Homeowners' self-esteem and desire to maintain and improve their homes also motivates them to be more active in community, civic, government and religious organizations, according to studies. And they are supporting the community financially by paying property taxes.

In those monthly financial management classes taught through Cooperative Extension, Springs learned: to set financial goals; to track his spending so he would be able to meet those goals; how to budget and save his money; to save receipts; and to pay his bills on time for a good credit rating.

Springs also established a line of credit by going to an area credit union, opening an account, and depositing a few hundred dollars that he could borrow against to shore up his credit. And he began to deposit more money into his savings and checking accounts.

Working with Deborah Womack, the Forsyth County family and consumer sciences Extension agent, Springs assessed his spending with the H Plan and money tracker financial management tools, developed through The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T. He determined that he was spending too much money on take-out food.

"I was eating out more than I needed to," says Springs, who is disabled and lives on a fixed income. "I realized that if I limited some of that, I'd be able to save more to buy a house."

Mind you, Springs was having $5 meals at KFC and Bojangles, not exactly eating high on the hog in fancy restaurants. But in tallying the receipts of those $5 meals, multiple times a week, Springs says he calculated a monthly expense of more than $100. So he began to buy more food in bulk, cook more meals at home, eat more healthfully and save money.

Deborah Womack, Forsyth County family and consumer sciences agent, reminds Springs how focused he was during financial literacy classes.

"Instead of robbing Peter to pay Paul," Springs says, "I had Paul's money and Peter's also."

Springs is less stressed and more empowered in his new neighborhood than his old. He moved from a small Section-8 subsidized house in a neighborhood where, he says, it was not uncommon for it to be: "3 o'clock in the morning and somebody might knock on my door saying, 'Can you give me…?'"

These days, if he's not outside cultivating the Swiss chard growing in his backyard garden, Springs might be inside working on the jewelry he designs, or putting finishing touches on his chicly decorated furnishings — which include heirlooms from his late mother and grandmother.

"My home gives me a benefit of being happier," Springs says. "I don't have to live in something that doesn't meet my standard of living."

A pantry with a heart

A community garden has become a source of produce for homeless and undernourished individuals who wouldn't be getting minimum daily requirements of healthy foods without caring neighbors.

Greg Levoniuk gives a tour of the West Salem Community Garden.

WINSTON-SALEM — A community garden that started as a way for West Salem residents to meet and know their neighbors has developed into a movement that is feeding area homeless and hungry people. Garden organizers hang a bag of fresh produce from the garden's gatepost each day of the growing season, and passersby are able to take what they need. More than 2,000 bags of fresh food — available in meal-sized helpings — have been distributed since 2004, using this honor system.

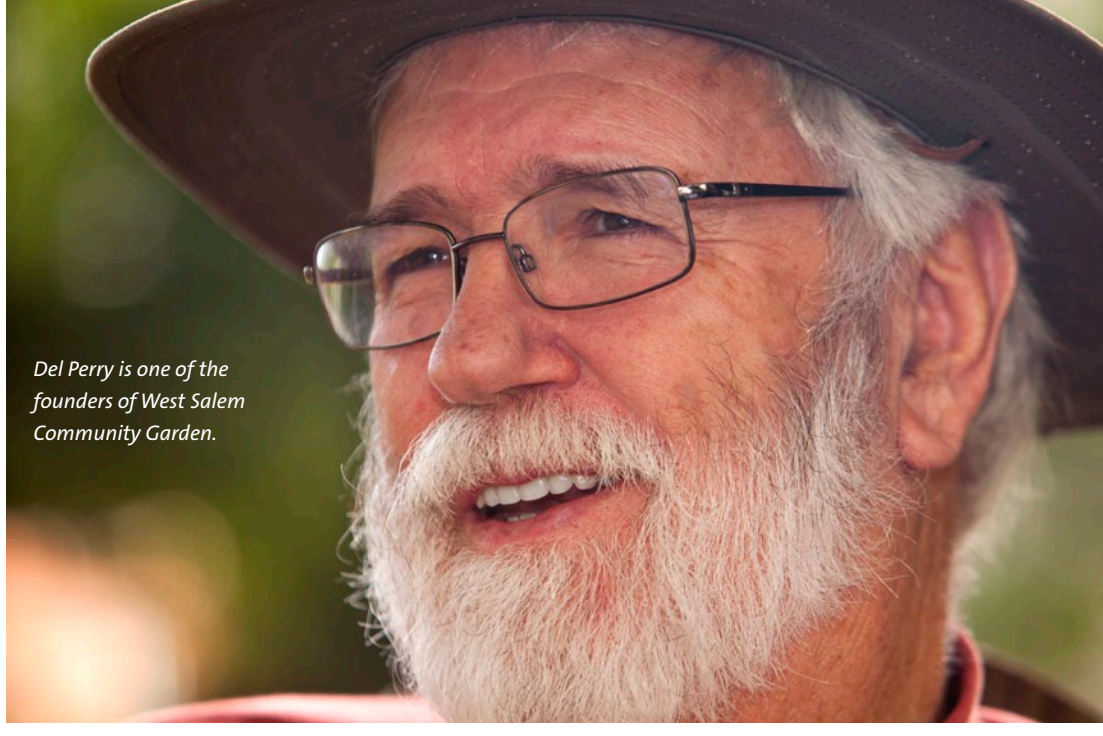
Cooperative Extension has been active in helping garden organizers prepare and cultivate this urban tract, which has grown from 2,100 square feet to 5,700 square feet of space in eight years, and has had as many as 32 plots. Don Mebane, the community resource development agent for Forsyth County Cooperative Extension, met with the neighborhood association and explained how Cooperative Extension could help with the initiative.

"We started the garden and then we asked Cooperative Extension to come in," says Del Perry, one of founders of the West Salem Community Garden. "The most important thing we get from Cooperative Extension is information."

Through the years, Cooperative Extension has provided technical assistance, training materials and site assistance, and has helped the garden get a $1,000 grant to help with tilling the land.

West Salem is a diverse mix of houses and residents, whose incomes vary from middle class to downtrodden. Perry moved here 10 years ago with his wife Deirdre, and they and neighbors realized the community garden's potential to become more

Del Perry, (left), talks to Greg Levoniuk and Don Mebane, (right), the community resource development agent for Forsyth County Cooperative Extension.



Del Perry is one of the founders of West Salem Community Garden.

than a social networking tool. People who were obviously homeless traversed the neighborhood daily, and there were other residents who weren't getting enough to eat. So the garden quickly became the neighborhood food bank, with the residents who work the plots happily donating most of their harvest for those in need.

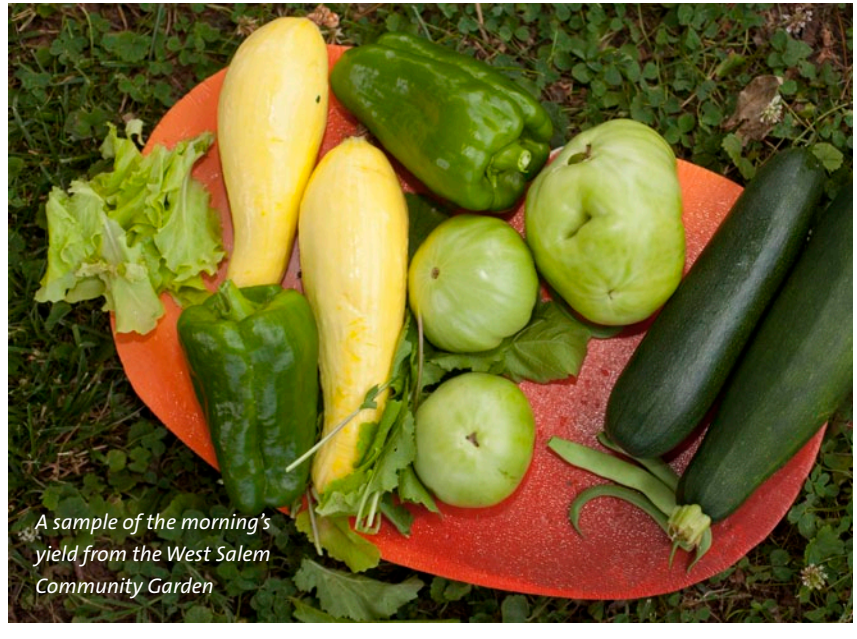
"The whole thing," says Perry, "was that 95 percent of what we are growing is going to the homeless and hungry, and 5 percent is what people take home. "We've never had any significant problem with people walking through and taking food without asking."

Most days from spring to fall, organizers hang "meal bags," stocked with lettuce, cucumbers, zucchini, okra, tomatoes or some other assortment, on a gatepost. Those in need find their way to the bag at some point during the day. Most are respectful, taking enough for them and their families and leaving what they can for others.

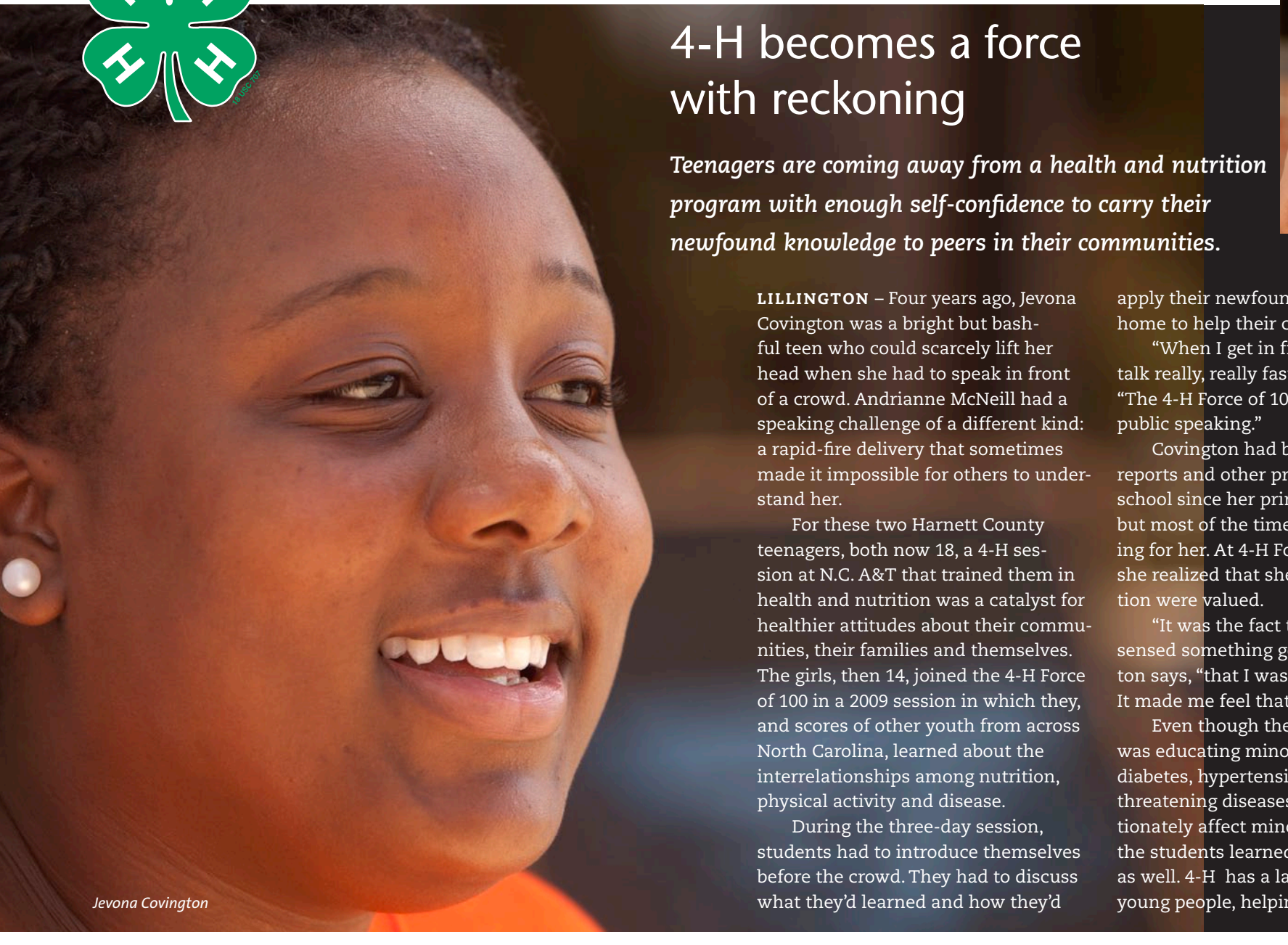
"We know it's beneficial because we see the same people coming back," says Greg Levoniuk, manager of the garden and cousin to Deirdre Perry. "We know that they are homeless or they can't afford to eat regularly.

"They'll come by early in the season as we're working and shout down here, 'When's the garden going to be ready?'"

The garden has drawn support across the community. Student volunteers from the nearby Piedmont Bible College have also worked the garden after harvest.



A sample of the morning's yield from the West Salem Community Garden



4-H becomes a force with reckoning

Teenagers are coming away from a health and nutrition program with enough self-confidence to carry their newfound knowledge to peers in their communities.

LILLINGTON – Four years ago, Jevona Covington was a bright but bashful teen who could scarcely lift her head when she had to speak in front of a crowd. Andrianne McNeill had a speaking challenge of a different kind: a rapid-fire delivery that sometimes made it impossible for others to understand her.

For these two Harnett County teenagers, both now 18, a 4-H session at N.C. A&T that trained them in health and nutrition was a catalyst for healthier attitudes about their communities, their families and themselves. The girls, then 14, joined the 4-H Force of 100 in a 2009 session in which they, and scores of other youth from across North Carolina, learned about the interrelationships among nutrition, physical activity and disease.

During the three-day session, students had to introduce themselves before the crowd. They had to discuss what they'd learned and how they'd apply their newfound knowledge at home to help their communities.

"When I get in front of people, I talk really, really fast," McNeill says. "The 4-H Force of 100 helped me with public speaking."

Covington had been making book reports and other presentations in school since her primary grade years, but most of the time it was excruciating for her. At 4-H Force of 100, though, she realized that she and her information were valued.

"It was the fact that someone else sensed something good in me," Covington says, "that I was selected to go on. It made me feel that I could do it."

Even though the focus of 4-H Force was educating minority youth about diabetes, hypertension and other life-threatening diseases that disproportionately affect minority communities, the students learned about leadership as well. 4-H has a lasting impact on young people, helping direct them to

Jevona Covington

Kittrane Sanders, Community and Rural Development Agent for Harnett County Cooperative Extension

success in later life. The 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development has found through its research — on more than 7,000 youth in 44 states — that those involved in 4-H are more motivated for higher education and are more involved in their communities than other youth.

Both girls graduated high school last May. Covington attends ECPI University in Raleigh and McNeill is a freshman in A&T's School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences.

Part of their success was amassed four years ago, when Covington and McNeill — along with three other Harnett County students — returned home from 4-H Force prepared to work. Under the guidance of Cooperative Extension Community and Rural Development Agent Kittrane Sanders, the students formed Teens on Point to educate community members about healthy eating and exercise. They worked with younger children, teaching them about better nutrition and exercise through a partnership with the Police Athletic League (PAL).

And with more polished communication skills, Covington and McNeill were propelled to take on leadership positions in their high school. McNeill became president of her high school chapter of FFA, and, unlike when she served as secretary of the organization in a previous year, she took her responsibilities seriously. She boned up on parliamentary procedure, was punctual, and strictly adhered to attendance requirements and other rules.

"I had to draw a line between a time to have fun and a time to be serious," McNeill says. "In meetings, I realized that it was disrespectful to have these side conversations going on while other people were talking.

"By working with Cooperative Extension, PAL and teaching, it helped me to become a better leader and a better leader in FFA."

Andrianne McNeill

Lenora Clark with grandchildren Courtney, (left), 13, and Cody, 11

Lenora Clark's parenting journal

Grandparenting gets support befitting expanded role

The Parenting Matters lessons developed by The Cooperative Extension Program at N.C. A&T State University are proving to be especially eye-opening for grandparents who find themselves back on the job as primary caregivers for grandchildren.

Clark (right) discusses the parenting journal she created with Scotland County Cooperative Extension Agent Sharon N. English.

LAURINBURG – Maybe. Just maybe, reasons Lenora Clark, if there had been a Parenting Matters program back when she was raising her two sons, things might have turned out differently. As it is, Clark believes she's been given a second chance.

She's raising her youngest son's two children. That's how she became acquainted with Parenting Matters, developed by The Cooperative Extension Program at N.C. A&T State University. The program teaches child-rearing techniques and strategies to at-risk parents. When Clark filed to get legal custody of the grandchildren she's helped raise since they were babies, social workers recommended that she take parenting classes offered through Scotland County Cooperative Extension.

"I was really mad about it," Clark says. "I said, 'I'm 50 years old. What can they teach me? I already know all I need.'… Boy was I wrong."

* * *

Clark's Laurinburg home is a nest of warm and fuzzy, full of family photographs, lace-front panels, soft recliners and cozy pillows. Hers is the house where all the kids come to play — those she's raising, their friends, as well as nieces and nephews and grand-generations. She is a favored sitter of most of her loved ones.

Being told that she needed help at child rearing — a skill at which others considered her to be an expert — was a bitter pill for Clark. But it ended up going down smoothly. Fifteen minutes into the Parenting Matters session taught by Sharon N. English, and Clark was relieved … and hooked. During an eight-week course in early 2011, English, the Scotland County Cooperative Extension family and consumer science educator, taught Parenting Matters participants that:

- Establishing routine and structure helps children to comply with expectations.
- "Because I said so" is not an effective explanation for children. Clark now takes the time to explain to a younger grandchild why he can't do something that an older child has permission to do.
- Continued yelling is ineffective because children will tune it out, once they realize that it's a pattern.
- Regular, uninterrupted family meals are important to communication.

"Spend one meal a day with your family: no TV, no cell phones, no radio," Clark says. "Just have light conversation."

Courtney and Cody Clark, 13 and 11, respectively, could tell the difference in their grandmother after she began the classes.

"Before, she would bite our head off," says Cody, laughing and shaking his head at the memory.

Now, though, Courtney says: "She talks to us. She asks us questions. Like if I get a bad grade, she'll say, 'Why didn't you study?'"

Bad grades, though, are rare for the siblings whose grades — along with their behavior — have improved to honor roll status. Clark stresses to her grandchildren that a good education is important to their future. Now, with stronger parenting techniques under her belt, she's more confident that their futures will be good.

"I want the best for my grandchildren," Clark says. "I want school, college — and that's the best way for them to succeed. I want them to have opportunities that I didn't have."

Damien Percell laughs while listening to his friend Robert King III.

Lifestyle upgrades with lifetime warranties

REIDSVILLE — Damien Percell and Robert King III are two Rockingham County teenagers who are different ages, go to different schools and have different career goals. They are nonetheless united by some strong commonalities: not the least of which is their involvement in the Rockingham County 4-H Impact Club.

Statistics show that 4-H'ers are more likely to get better grades and take full advantage of educational and extracurricular opportunities than their peers, and that 4-H'ers are far less likely to heed the lure of bad influences than youths who aren't getting gentle persuasions for what's best for their heads, hearts, hands and health.

Through 4-H, the teens have not only made friends and connections that they expect to take them into adulthood, but they've learned more about their community and the people in it — including one another.

"I didn't know Robert before, or Caleb and Ricky and Ahmad," Damien says of the friends he's made through 4-H. "But I know we're going to be lifelong friends."

Their 4-H Impact Club meets monthly at Smith-Stokes Chevrolet automobile dealership, which volunteered to host the youth meetings. The group meets on Saturdays, when the Rockingham County Extension Center, which coordinates 4-H activities, is closed. 4-H associate Perry Graves, who once worked for Smith-Stokes, says the auto dealer's civic support is just one more lesson that demonstrates community to the young people he guides.

Graves and his cadre of volunteers, many of them men like himself, are intent on teaching and modeling good citizenship for Impact Club members. Damien, 15,

Damien Percell (left) and Robert King III (right) give their attention to 4-H associate Perry Graves during a summer meeting.

Robert King III thinks over a question during a 4-H Impact Club meeting.

admits to being a class clown in his early elementary years. Robert, 17, confesses that he was a bit unfocused. Both, though, have learned how to be more responsible through such activities as poster presentations, leadership exercises, mentoring younger club members and community service projects.

Boys such as Robert and Damien are far more likely to go to college than not when involved in extracurricular and civic activities such as 4-H. The largest youth organization in the country has more than 6 million members and a proven track record for helping motivate youth to adult success.

The 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development started in 2002 reports that regardless of race, gender and socioeconomic status, 4-H'ers report they are engaged in school and getting better grades. Statistics also show that they are more than three times as likely to delay sexual intercourse until grade 12, are nearly twice as likely to go to college, and have significantly lower drug, alcohol and cigarette use than their peers.

By fifth grade, thanks to an understanding teacher and 4-H discipline, Damien was able to transform his clowning into conformity.

"I used to mess with pens and tap the table, but in 4-H we learned to sit still and listen to what the person was saying — and we took that (behavior) to school," Damien says.

Today, Damien is on the A-B honor roll at Rockingham County High School and Robert is on the A-B honor roll at Reidsville High. Both have other school commitments, but maintain their involvement in 4-H. Robert, who is also an Eagle Scout, was the 4-H volunteer of the year for Rockingham County in 2011.

"Without 4-H, I probably wouldn't have known what career path to be on," says Robert, who wants to be an artist. "I wasn't motivated. But my involvement with 4-H helped me to get more focused, and then I put together a folder of my drawings."

Robert is headed to college in the fall and plans to major in graphic design. Damien has a couple more years of high school, and unless something drastic changes his mind, he will stick with a dream he has had since he was 10 of becoming a member of the elite Navy SEALs.

"The Navy SEAL training is going to be immensely hard," Damien says. "Knowing all the things I've learned and been through, I'll keep them in the back of my mind, if I'm ever on the edge and ready to quit.

"4-H gave me courage. It's preparing me to never quit."

Microgreen scene letting the sunshine in

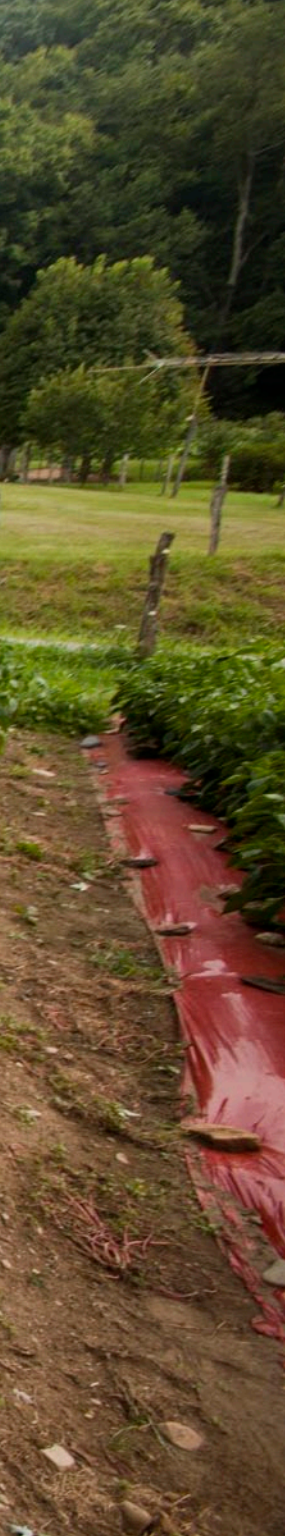
Farmers who run into a disheartening mountain of regulations and paperwork required for organic production are finding knowledgeable guides at their county Extension centers.

BOONE — Baby arugula with summer squash risotto; lump crabmeat with black truffle vinaigrette over micro-greens: These elegant meals are on the menus at fancy restaurants, but they get their start from the salt of the earth.

Sunshine Cove Farm is where tray after tray of colorful microgreens begin their evolution from greenhouse seed to dinner plate at some of the finest restaurants in the region.

Owners Jill and David Nicklaw, their children and an employee bustle throughout Sunshine Cove, throughout the day tending the 1,000-square-foot greenhouse plants, and harvesting the 7,000 square feet of outdoor organic vegetables. Any given moment finds Jill Nicklaw trotting barefoot through lush green grass from one site to the next, as she picks or plucks or preps the likes of red chard, Thai basil, red Russian kale, mizuna, bok choy or miniature eggplants.

Jill and David Nicklaw display the day's harvest from their Watauga County farm.



Microgreens from Watuaga County's Sunshine Cove Farm have become part of the menu at several area restaurants.

Extension Area Agent Richard Boylan passes along some tips to Jill Nicklaw.

The term microgreens refers to a variety of greens in their young stages, bigger than sprouts but much smaller than a full-sized green. Petite greens tend to be about 1 to 1½ inches in length. They also tend to be all the rage now in fine dining.

"When you offer a unique product, something you can't get at a Lowe's or some other place, people will buy it and people will pay money for it," says Jill Nicklaw. "Everything we grow is something unique."

Jill Nicklaw has always loved growing food, and even had a garden when she was a student at Appalachian State University. When the Nicklaws moved to their Watauga County property in 2008, they promptly considered how to put it to work for them. The couple decided to farm, but carefully examined what the marketplace needed that wasn't already being provided. David Nicklaw's research took him to the seed catalogues, and from there, they decided on microgreens.

The Nicklaws became the first microgreens producers selling at the teeming Watauga County Farmers Market. They have gone on to sell to about 30 local and regional restaurants. Yet, even with all their research and moxie, they realized they needed help. Jill Nicklaw turned to Watauga County Cooperative Extension. At first it was enrolling in an organic production and certification class taught by Extension Area Agent Richard Boylan. Then it was trying to get a coveted spot at the Watauga County Farmers Market — which routinely has a waiting list of well over 100 farmers. Even now, the Nicklaws rely on Boylan to help diagnose any issue with their operation. There have been abnormal growths on the greens that, try as she might, Jill Nicklaw can't find answers for on the Internet.

"Just recently when Richard was out here, I'm asking him, 'What is this problem and what should I do about it?'" Jill Nicklaw explains. "I feel really stressed when I don't know what I need to do. Richard has helped me with a variety of advice on different problems. That's important because I maintain optimum health in my greenhouse."

The Nicklaws' organic operation requires adherence to lots of regulations, and there's lots of paperwork to track. But there's also lots of enthusiasm for this particular farming niche. What the Nicklaws began as a sideline has grown full scale into full-time income.

Sales of garden vegetables and microgreens at the farmers market generate good income, but the expansion of the microgreens into the commercial arena has developed into Sunshine Cove's bread and butter. Before purchasing from the Nicklaws, some regional restaurants were sending for the greens from as far away as the West Coast. Even though microgreens have a good shelf life, by the time some of them arrived, after three days' travel, they'd be wilting by the fourth day, restaurant owners lamented.

The Nicklaws, though, grow as many as 20 different varieties of greens and sell to about 20 restaurants in Boone, Blowing Rock, Banner Elk and surrounding areas. They also have commercial customers in Kitty Hawk and New Bern, and as far away as Georgia. They ship the greens in insulated coolers by UPS for overnight delivery, to ensure that they arrive fresh and timely.

"This is really our cash crop," David Nicklaw says. "The production of microgreens here at Sunshine Cove Farm has greatly increased our income, and that is due in no small part to the help of Richard Boylan at Cooperative Extension."

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

DURHAM — The last time we saw Yolanda Black, she was refashioning old jeans and other denim into custom-made handbags. She was 12 and had learned business strategies through Mini-Society, the 4-H program that uses hands-on lessons in entrepreneurship, economics and citizenship to teach adolescents about the society they will soon be entering.

Now 18, Black is a Reidsville High School graduate and freshman at N.C. Central University. She no longer makes the denim purses, but the pocketbook she does carry is stocked with cash because she's still using strategies she learned in Mini-Society.

"As far as learning to save your money, that really helped," says Black.

In addition to the business she started as an adolescent with a cousin and a friend, Black went on to a series of part-time jobs throughout her high school years. She worked at a fast-food restaurant, a grocery store, and two school-based businesses: a campus child care center and a branch of a local credit union, where she was one of two students hand-picked to help staff the center. When she left for college in August, Black was able to buy all her own dorm room supplies — linens, kitchen goods and decorative items — and new clothes. The bulk of her tuition and board are paid for with academic scholarships, including financial support from a Booker T. Washington scholarship; Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc.; Golden LEAF; and Zion Baptist Church, where she attended a summer program that introduced her to Mini-Society.

The 12-year-old Black wanted to be a teacher when she grew up, and the 18-year-old Black is, indeed, majoring in elementary education. Mini-Society lessons on leadership and planning have taken root in her higher education strategy for success. In addition to being a member of the University's Maroon and Gray cheerleading squad, Black is also in the Lady Eagle development program for students who are mentored by upperclassmen.

"I'm participating in the mentorship program to make sure I stay focused," Black says. "Some people get caught up in too much social life. I want to have fun in school, but I want to make sure I graduate on time. I wanted a program to help me find a balance."

Yolanda Black, now 18, is a freshman at North Carolina Central University.

Bratts Club members from left: Asia Walker, Yolanda Black and Rachael Chestnut pose, several years ago, with their wares.

REIDSVILLE – The adolescent, money-making, pocketbook-designing Bratts Club of Rockingham County dissolved after its trio of young founders left middle school. But the lessons, friendships and family bonds that fostered the club and its business, are still intact.

Asia Walker and Rachael Chestnut, two-thirds of the club, still regularly practice lessons they learned through Mini-Society, the 4-H program that uses hands-on lessons in entrepreneurship, economics and citizenship to teach adolescents about society.

Both girls are in the International Baccalaureate Program at Reidsville High School, hold offices in student government, and are also cheerleaders. Their days are chockfull of classes, practices, meetings and homework. The organization, commitment and planning they learned through Mini-Society helps them keep track of their activities and responsibilities.

"I learned that you have to be dedicated and make decisions on your own and not depend on other people; and you need to be very organized," says Asia, 16, whose list of school responsibilities include serving as student-government treasurer. "I keep everything on my Gmail calendar and my phone, and I write everything down."

Neither girl wants to pursue a career in business — Rachael is interested in neurology and psychology and Asia wants to be a pharmacist — but the financial lessons they learned early on are still paying off in other ways.

At the height of their business, the Bratts were selling as many as 10 purses a week, at prices of $5, $7.50 and $10.

"It really did teach me a lot about business and managing a business," says Rachael, a 17-year-old senior. "It was a lot of fun, but it was a lot of work, too. It taught me how to better interact with people and to know what is and isn't appropriate to communicate to people."

The greater lesson of what they all learned through Mini-Society was that starting a business was possible, with adequate research, planning, resources and ingenuity — even for adolescents. Running a successful business as elementary-to-middle school students helped polish the confidence that had already been instilled in the girls by their families and their church. Mini-Society equipped them with a track record.

"You have to work hard, but it is possible to have a business," says Asia, a junior. "You really can make money."

Rachael Chestnut and Asia Walker are both standout students and cheerleaders at Reidsville High School.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Antonio Powell

WINDSOR — Jennifer Harris, 4-H youth development agent for Bertie County Cooperative Extension, saw potential in the students she worked with, potential that they often didn't even know they had.

A standout student at the Bertie County STEM High School he attends, Antonio Powell, has always been able to compete academically. But he wasn't always aware of what he describes as his "ability to talk and be forceful." Through 4-H and its array of activities, Harris helped Antonio speak more effectively in public and become more confident.

"I always was known as a shy person and Ms. Jen helped me to open up," says Antonio, 16. "I owe part of that to Ms. Jen for helping me open up easier and just be my true self."

Even though Harris died unexpectedly last summer, the lessons she taught, and the example she modeled, live on in Antonio and other Bertie County 4-H participants. Antonio's leadership, organization, and public speaking abilities have all been strengthened through such 4-H experiences as volunteering at a local food pantry, attending Citizenship Focus in Washington, and helping form the local Teen Council, a 4-H advisory group.

"It's been very successful, because it taught us how to recruit people to volunteer in the food pantry. We've learned to be better speakers and to engage," Antonio says.

When working at the local food bank last year, Antonio learned about a summer research program at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. After researching the program, Antonio continued to follow up with Harris for references and recommendations. He applied and was accepted as one of 20 participants in the 2012 summer Research Apprenticeship Program (RAP) in the School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences.

"I was very excited when I learned I was accepted, and I started counting down the days until it started," says Antonio, who had a friend in a previous RAP class who touted the experience. "The program was what I expected."

The summer experience brought

Antonio Powell conducts food science research with Dr. Salam Ibrahim, (left), while attending the Research Apprenticeship Program at North Carolina A&T State University.

him to A&T's campus for three weeks, where he was paired with an SAES researcher, learned about food science, developed and presented a poster, interacted with other students and had the opportunity to immerse himself in a specific agricultural research field. Antonio flourished during his on-campus residency, emerging as a scholar and a leader. And he knows, as well, that his current and future success will be folded into Jennifer Harris's legacy of mentoring young people through 4-H.

"She was inspirational and powerful," Antonio says. "She taught us a lot of things that we were still discovering about our own selves, pointing out our good qualities, what we're good at, as well as what we need to improve.

"I miss her."

Jennifer Harris

"I miss her."

— Antonio Powell, who shares a moment with Harris in 2011 as they stock bags at the food bank where 4-H club members volunteered. Also pictured (from left) are Virgil Siefker, Rayshawn Evans and Nicole Evans (right).

Associate Administrator's Message

ALL MOST PEOPLE WANT IN LIFE IS THE OPPORTUNITY to make a good life; for their families, for themselves, for their communities.

Responding to that wish is what Cooperative Extension does. We're helping North Carolinians improve their lives, and to do that we have to understand how people live and what they want: successful children; safe and comfortable homes; economic opportunities; a healthful, safe and abundant food supply; an unpolluted environment; and prosperous communities, as well as other standard expectations for a thriving and vibrant community.

Here are some recent examples of successful impacts The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T has had in these areas here.

COMMUNITY GARDENS BOOST FOOD SUPPLIES AND HEALTHFUL EATING: The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T put an infusion of momentum into community gardens in 11 counties, and the result was 2,391 participants in programs that provided fresh produce with local origins. In Bertie, Durham, and Scotland counties, community gardens yielded 3,329 pounds of produce, which allowed almost 600 adults and nearly 600 youths to increase their daily consumption of fruits and vegetables significantly.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE GAINS MOMENTUM: The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T brought 2,660 producers from 14 counties into sustainable agriculture programs. Net farm income was increased $667,682 for 1,004 farmers adopting plasticulture, high tunnels, greenhouses and cold frames and alternative enterprises. There were 941 producers adding $622,655 to their farms' income by using agribusiness and marketing strategies, and another 715 producers boosted farm income by $242,144 by using best management practices. Small-scale and limited-resource producers were able to sustain their farms financially and environmentally by adopting alternative enterprises, agribusiness and marketing strategies, and best management practices.

PARENTING LESSONS DEVELOP STRONGER FAMILIES: Five counties that have implemented a parental education program developed by A&T Extension gave 414 parents training that has proven effective in demanding circumstances. Many parents were referred to Cooperative Extension programs by the court system, social service or other agencies. Three hundred and ninety-five parents are using effective parenting strategies to raise their children. The effective parenting strategies have reduced discipline problems at home and schools and parents are able to communicate effectively with their children.

DIRECT MARKETING GETS ADDED SENSE OF DIRECTION: In nine counties targeted by The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T for assistance in involving more farmers in farmers markets, 650 producers were provided guidance. The bottom lines then came down to 145 additional producers selling $360,000 in produce at local markets, and 787 new customers indicating the draw of locally grown produce was a major factor in their decision to give the local farmers market a try.

FOCUS ON YOUTH HELPS PREPARE OUR FUTURE: Three counties with special commitments to engage more youth in leadership training and consensus-building projects were able to make a difference in the lives of 118 youths. Twenty of these youths went on to apply their newfound skills to leadership for community groups. Youth development work also inspired 418 youths to volunteer 2,089 hours — a value to their communities of $42,421.

VOLUNTEERS STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES: Four counties put a special emphasis on adding to the number of volunteers they could turn to, and then went on to get 258 adults trained and ready to help out. From that reserve, 168 volunteers donated service in a variety of roles that would have cost $109,366 for paid employees. The volunteers' contributions included helping youth in their communities to develop valuable communication, decision making, and team building skills to help them become leaders in their schools and communities.

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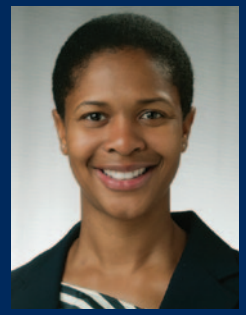

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